



A12 The Sacramento Bee | Saturday, September 10, 2011
FROM THE COVER

"I ask your forgiveness as I return, with the help of God and my superior, to a strict path of sobriety."

REV. JULIAN MEDINA, priest at All Hallows Church, in a statement to parishioners after he entered treatment for alcoholism

Priest: Social drinking accepted

FROM PAGE A1
lows Parish in Sacramento. They did not know that the Rev. Julian Medina had a drinking problem. That changed last month, when the parochial vicar showed up an hour late for a baptism, slurred his words and later fell down. Parents complained. Medina was suspended from ministry indefinitely and has entered treatment, according to diocesan officials.

Hannan heard about Medina from other priests and saw stories about him on TV and thought, "That could have been me."

Hannan, who is 82 today, is retired from full-time ministry and is reluctant to speak about his drinking.

Only parishioners he has seen at Alcoholics Anonymous meetings know. "They'd be shocked and say, 'Father, what are you doing here?'" he said. "I tell them, 'I'm here for the same reason you are.'"

Unfortunately, he said, Medina's troubles show that priests share their parishioners' struggles.

Drinking can be part of job

About 15.5 million people, or 6 percent of all U.S. residents over 12, are alcoholics, according to the latest data from the U.S. Substance Abuse and Mental Health Administration.

Diocesan officials said they do not know how many of the 227 active priests in the Sacramento Diocese have been treated for alcoholism.

The Rev. Philip Wells, pastor of Sacred Heart Church in Anderson, is an alcoholic who attends AA meetings about once a week. He estimated he knows of about 10 alcoholic priests who have sought treatment and are now sober.

"That doesn't count ones who have not gotten treatment or the ones I don't know about," he said. "And I'm sure there are both."

No recent study has been done on priests on alcoholism, according to Mary Gautier, senior research associate of the Center for Applied Re-



Hector Amezcua hamezcua@sacbee.com

The Rev. John Hannan prepares to say Mass on Wednesday at St. Mel Church in Fair Oaks. Hannan, 82, is retired from full-time ministry and is reluctant to speak about his drinking. He drank because of "intense loneliness," he says, but Alcoholics Anonymous is a big part of his life now. "I never want to be that drunk priest again."

search in the Apostolate at Georgetown University.

"But Catholics are not opposed to drinking; it is quite accepted socially and culturally," said Gautier. "Other faith groups, such as Mormon or Muslims or evangelical Christians, discourage drinking, but it is a normal part of the Catholic faith for many."

Richard Sipe, a former Benedictine who has written about the Catholic Church, said alcoholism is a long-standing problem in the church.

"The priesthood is a very special kind of vocation because the church demands discipline and perpetual chastity," said Sipe. "Imagine how difficult that is."

Priests are expelled, where priests are permitted to throw one down in the beer garden, to the annual appreciation dinner, where the priest often makes a toast, drinking is a often part of the job, said Wells.

"To have a church function with no alcohol served is almost like preaching heresy," Wells said. He recognizes the stereotype of the Catho-

lic priest who has a joking problem. "I've heard the drinking I cringe because it's not funny if you've been there."

Faith, support groups vital

Wells, 59, has not had a drink in 32 years. He became a priest 28 years ago and still struggles. His eyes instinctively fall toward the liquor aisle in the grocery store. "Rum and coke, that was my drink," Wells said.

Wells sometimes attends AA meetings more when work and life become stressful. After his brother died in 2004, Wells attended three AA meetings a day.

He received a dispensation from the bishop and does not drink from the Communion cup.

"For me, even one sip is too many," he said. "Even though it is the blood of Christ it is still under the form of wine. I can't take that chance."

Hannan and Wells credit their faith and their support groups for their recovery. "If you think you can do it by yourself, then you're in trouble," said Hannan.

Church leaders step in quickly if they see a priest struggling, said the Rev. James Murphy, vicar general of the diocese. "If we find that a priest seems to be overdrinking, we will contact him right away and get him help."

Priests today don't drink as much as priests did a generation ago, said Murphy. "We emphasize over and over the importance of a healthy lifestyle."

As for Medina, he has the support of many parishioners, said one. "Yes, he made a mistake. We are heartbroken," said Sue Sanchez Grela, chairwoman of the parish council. "But we expect our priests to be perfect, and it's not fair. He deserves our compassion."

In an announcement read to parishioners after his suspension, Medina explained. He said the day before the baptism had been his day off. "Instead of planning to spend the day with people, I stayed home and turned to drink," his statement said. The next day, he drank more to calm himself before the baptism.

"I do not make any excuses for my behavior. It was wrong and I am deeply sorry," the statement said. "I ask your forgiveness as I return, with the help of God and my superiors, to a strict path of sobriety."

After the announcement was read, many parishioners applauded. Hannan knows what Medina is going through. He drank out of "intense loneliness," he said. Hannan hit bottom in 1974. He was charged with a DUI. His bishop ordered him to enter treatment.

He retired in 2005, lives at the priest retirement home in Citrus Heights, and fills in for priests on vacation, most recently at St. Mel.

AA is also a big part of his life. "I never want to be that drunk priest again," he said. He helps other alcoholics who call him to talk. And he has his daily talk with God, expressing thanks for his recovery.

On Hannan's coffee table sits his Bible. Next to it is a collection of tattered, well-worn pages he reads regularly. That's his AA book.

Call The Bee's Jennifer Garza, (916) 321-1133.

Airport: Artist wants people to stop, think about rabbit



Randy Pench rpench@sacbee.com

Sacramento artist Suzanne Adan created this mosaic, titled "Flying Colors," featuring birds and tules in the marsh areas around the airport. It is installed in the new terminal's concourse.

FROM PAGE A1
money has been set aside for upkeep. The money comes from airport revenues, not city or county budgets.

Sacramento Metropolitan Arts Commission representatives say their goal is art strong enough to stand out amid the airport hubbub.

That starts with the rabbit. Designed by Denver artist Lawrence Argent, the rabbit appears to have leaped into the four-story, glass building from the fields outside, and is diving toward a granite suitcase, the size of a queen bed, sitting on the baggage claim area floor. The suitcase top is a swirling vortex.

Some county officials were not thrilled. Former County Supervisor Roger Dickinson, now an assemblyman, expressed misgivings when the rabbit was shown to the county board for approval, saying he isn't sure it represents Sacramento. Supervisor Susan Peters opposed the rabbit too, asking, "Why not a cougar or wild turkey?"

Shelly Willis, the arts commission's public art director, however, called the rabbit "spectacular," and said it will grab travelers' attention and possibly prick their sense of wonder: Does it represent a harried traveler? Is it rushing to gather its luggage and get out of there? Or is it a child's stuffed toy, leaping to the safety of its suitcase?

Nationally known artist Donald Lipski said the rabbit fits in its new home. "I love the scale of it, the energy, the way it is leaping through the air, the whimsy."

Lipski, of Philadelphia, is creator of another new airport art piece, the "Acorn Steam" sculpture that hangs



A construction worker walks past artwork in the shape of a horn in the new terminal. Designed by Louise Bertelsen and Po Shu Wang, it includes an Internet-linked computer that converts typed messages into music.

in the jet computer building. The title is an anagram that, when the letters are rearranged, forms a local city name.

The piece is a chandelier resembling three valley oak tree trunks connected at the center and splaying out like a propeller. Five thousand crystals adorn its limbs. Lipski says he can't wait to see it when the early morning sun hits the crystals.

The rabbit and the chandelier fit an underlying theme at the new facility. Both the architecture and some of the artwork are designed to link with nature. The main terminal's arched ceiling girders echo the tree canopy of Sacramento neighborhood streets.

Other artists have created mosaics depicting animals, especially birds. A major wall piece depicts the faces of Sacramento baggage handlers. The arts commission website at www.sacmetroarts.org contains in-

formation about all the airport art. Viewers can get an early look for free at an airport open house Oct. 2. Reservations can be made at www.eventbrite.com.

A smaller party will be held Oct. 1. Cost is \$75. Reservations can be made at www.experienceparty.eventbrite.com.

The arts commission plans to offer airport art tours by request after opening day.

Artist Argent said he knows some people will stop and scratch their heads when they see his red rabbit. But that's what he wants.

"In the visual bedlam of an airport, it gives you a moment of reflection," he said. "You will think about something the prompter, something personal. Then it will have done what it is supposed to do."

Call The Bee's Tony Bizjak, (916) 321-1059.

COMING IN THE BEE

FIXING CARS — AND FUTURES

SUNDAY: Folsom State Prison inmates are gaining auto tech skills in an effort to jump-start their lives when they're released. We check out the program that helps them. **SUNDAY BUSINESS**

FINAL NOTES

SUNDAY: If a bugler plays taps at a military funeral in the Sacramento area, chances are you're hearing Baldwin Wong. What is he feeling when he puts the bugle to his mouth? **LIVING HERE: SUNDAY**



STAY CONNECTED

SHARE YOUR 9/11 MEMORIES

"Where were you?" — a special feature at sacramento.remembers911.com — is a growing collection of Americans' memories of that day. Read what others have to say, and share your story.

ON YOUR CELLPHONE

sacbee.com

ON FACEBOOK

facebook.com/sacramentobee

ON TWITTER

twitter.com/sacbee_news

WITH EMAIL ALERTS

sacbee.com/email

